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BOOK REVIEWS

The Mesta: A Study in Spanish Economic History, 1273-1836. By JULIUS KLEIN, PH.D. Harvard Economic Studies, Vol. XXI. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920. Pp. xvi, 444. \$4.00.)

In this book, which was awarded the David A. Wells prize for the year 1917-18, Dr. Klein has made an analytical study of the organization, activities, and varied influences of the Castilian sheep owners' gild (*Honrado Concejo de la Mesta*), called the Mesta. Of the significance of this institution, he remarks, in one place (p. viii), "The long and active life of this body from 1273 to 1836 has been a notable and in many ways unique feature of Spanish economic history. For hundreds of years it played a vital part in the adjustment of problems involving overseas trade, public lands, pasturage, and taxation". In addition it is shown that its history presents vividly the six-century-long effort of a state to control the production and marketing of an essential raw material; that this institution was employed as a nationalizing and centralizing force to overcome the persistent traditions of particularism in the Spanish peninsula—political and social, as well as economic; that in committing the country to pastoral interests it contributed to agricultural decay; that in all probability it was a party to the expulsions of the Jews and the Moriscoes; and that so closely linked was it with the social and political factors that a study of the Mesta throws much informative and explanatory light on certain obscure aspects of the Spanish judicial, taxation, and municipal policies and practices. Despite its importance, the many controversies in which it participated, and the bitter criticism directed at it, the Mesta has never previously been studied after the methods of scientific research. Dr. Klein's is, therefore, a pioneer work. For it, he was admirably equipped after making an examination of the materials found in Spain, Italy, Paris, Berlin, and London. His work is, to a considerable degree, based on the archives of the Mesta, a collection of more than 62,000 manuscript items (p. 403), now for the first time used for such a purpose. His researches in different countries enable him to make comparative studies of the sheep raising industry.

The author divides his book into four general divisions. The first

is devoted to the internal organization of the Mesta, under which in appropriate chapters are considered the origin of the Mesta, the evolution of the practices connected with the sheep migrations, the use and control of the sheep highways (*cañadas*), the organization of the flocks, the marketing, for domestic and foreign trade, of wool, and the constitution of the Mesta itself—its officers and their election, duties, and privileges. In this part, the antiquity of the elements of the migratory sheep industry, existent in Spain “from Iberian and Visigothic times” is shown, followed by discussions of the pastoral customs of the Berbers and the methods of the medieval town *mestas* or assemblies for the disposal of stray animals. The climatic and topographic basis of sheep migrations is presented as fundamental. The chapters which treat of the routes of the sheep highways—with the centers or starting points in León, Segovia-Soria, Burgos-Logroño, and Cuenca—together with the customs developing around the annual migrations and the conflicts with local prejudices and laws are among the most interesting of the book. The chapter on the governmental organization of the Mesta, its codes and charters, its vested and stubbornly guarded privileges, shows how closely that institution came to be associated with the interests and policies of the crown both as an agency of mercantilism and an instrumentality of nationalization. The Mesta is here described as an efficient, harmoniously working machine with an internally democratic organization and procedure. It would seem to the reviewer that this chapter could have been placed with perhaps more logic and effect after that on origins.

The other three parts of the book on Judiciary, Taxation, and Pasturage might be considered under the general heading of the external relationship of the Mesta to the crown, the landowners, and the towns. In this division, also, the effective methods, the concerted action, of the Mesta are studied. These are seen “in the prosecutions of its itinerant legal staff [that is, for the protection of the flocks against extortionate tolls, pasturage rentals, and local encroachments on the sheep highways (pp. 62, 63, 98)], in its financial obligations to the crown, or in its collective bargaining with pasturage owners” (p. 62). The office of *alcalde entregador*, the Mesta’s chief judicial officer, is examined as to origin, growth of powers, and decline, the last being due in part to the establishment in the late sixteenth century of the *chancillertas* or appellate courts under royal control. The treatment of the subject of the royal taxation of the sheep industry is, it is believed, one of the ablest of the book. Being too complex and technical for brief analysis,

it must suffice for it to be said that the exploitation by the crown especially under the Hapsburgs and during the virtual bankruptcy of the seventeenth century, the forced loans, and the heavy expenses incident to the effort to retain the favors of the government, contributed to the decline of the Mesta. Concerning pasturage, some of the gravest charges were made against the Mesta, namely, that its practices resulted in or tended to bring about deforestation, rural depopulation, and agricultural stagnation. The agrarian interests aided by the towns and the non-migratory sheep raisers, made a slowly progressive fight against the Mesta's pastoral privileges. Finally its "pretensions of mastery over agrarian Castile" were overthrown in the notable work of Campomanes during the late eighteenth century. Among other phases of the great struggle between agricultural and pastoral interests, much attention is given to the complicated subject of enclosures.

Under Appendices (pp. 361-400), the author has printed illustrative extracts from town Mesta ordinances; royal concessions, commissions, and instructions; records of procedure from the courts of the *entregadores*; taxation ordinances; and credentials of Mesta representatives. There is included also a valuable glossary of terms, often uncommon, indicating local taxes levied on sheep. The critical chapter on bibliography is an excellent piece of work, thoroughly and carefully done. The work throughout is heavily documented with elaborate footnotes.

Dr. Klein has performed a service for the student of Spanish history. He has "added to the sum of available knowledge" in a "work of enduring value". He has opened up as having "tempting possibilities" and as being practically unexplored fields other than that in which he was primarily interested. It is hoped that his suggestions will be taken by scholars and followed with equal success.

W. W. PIERSON, JR.

The Railroads of Mexico. By FRED WILBUR POWELL, PH. D. (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1921. Pp. vii, 226. \$2.00.)

This volume is the result of investigations made while the author was a member of a group of students of Mexican conditions working under the auspices of Mr. E. L. Doheny. With it and the works published by Walter Flavius McCaleb,¹ Wallace Thompson,² and Chester

¹*Past and Present Banking in Mexico*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1920; *The Finances of Mexico*, New York.

²*The People of Mexico: Trading with Mexico*; New York, Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1921.